

NEWSLETTER 2016



Dolly Parton Partnership Boosts My First Books of South Carolina **New studies show long-term impact of books-by-mail program on enrolled children**

Thousands of South Carolina children are receiving a free book-a-month from Dolly Parton's Imagination Library, thanks to **My First Books of South Carolina** and its Charleston County affiliate, **Begin With Books**. Nearly 1,000 children enrolled just this summer, thanks to donors from all over the state including Miss Parton's own Dollywood Foundation.

The purpose of the program is to increase kindergarten readiness and reading skills in subsequent grades. New research has demonstrated that children who



participate in the program are significantly more likely to finish high school, go to college, and maintain steady employment than others. In some counties in South Carolina, as much as 40% of children enter kindergarten without the literacy skills necessary to do the work expected of them.



Communities and community organizations desiring to implement the program are encouraged to contact Sara Waggoner or Nell Killoy (Midlands) to learn more about how easy and affordable it is to enroll children in any community in South Carolina. Others can simply make a tax-deductible contribution online (www.MyFirstBooksSC.org) or through the Palmetto Project. Our annual cost per child is \$33. **Nell Killoy** nkilloy@palmettoproject.org **Sara Waggoner** swaggoner@palmettoproject.org



New Initiatives Provide Affordable Legal Services and Innovative Job Preparation **Palmetto Project nurtures new projects to address state's unmet needs**

Two important initiatives we've been mentoring took giant steps toward independence this summer as they opened their doors to residents of the Lowcountry.

Affordable Legal Services. **Charleston Legal Access**, a non-profit law firm created by Attorney Sally Newman, provides legal services to South Carolinians of modest means at an hourly rate based on a sliding scale and reduced rates. According to Sally, many people who cannot afford a lawyer or do not qualify for access to legal services for the poor, "take the risk of going without an attorney, only to find themselves in worse financial and legal trouble because of their lack of professional guidance. Our priorities are transparency, openness, and unflagging dedication to the interests of our clients."

CLA is now its own non-profit organization and acquired its 501(c)(3) designation from the Internal Revenue Service.

Innovative Job Preparation. **The Step UP Network**, sponsored by the Palmetto Project for nearly two years, celebrated its newly-awarded designation as the first South Carolina affiliate of the New York-based STRIVE program this summer. STRIVE has achieved significant success providing education, training and social support for people who've been frustrated in their efforts to secure sustained and meaningful employment. The program has been featured on CBS News and 60 Minutes and has a solid record of programming that leads to employment. Step UP is funded by the Rom Reddy Foundation through the Coastal Community Foundation.





“I Voted” Sticker Celebrates Democracy and Increased Voter Turnout

Turnouts in 2004, 2008, and 2012 were the only time in history a majority of South Carolinians 18 & older voted

Every general election South Carolina voters are handed one of our “I Voted” stickers as a reminder that in our state every vote counts and every voter matters. It is also a reminder that voter turnout has new records nearly every time we have held a statewide election.



In 1992 South Carolina ranked 50th – dead last – among the states in the percentage of its 18+ citizens who were actually voting. In 1994 we pulled together our **Palmetto Voter Project** – a coalition of groups committed to improving elections – and our national standing began to rise. By 1998 our numbers placed us in the mid-30s among the states.

In response to the 2000 election debacle in Florida, the state’s governor reached out to the Palmetto Project to lead a statewide effort to modernize the state’s election systems. That effort resulted in more modern and consistent voting practices throughout the state, better poll worker training, and removed many threats to accurate and fair reporting of election returns. Rather than following behind the other states, South Carolina has become a model for other states and communities... and we expect that to continue for a long time.

The Palmetto Project has also been instrumental in recruiting and training citizens as young as 16-years-old to work as poll managers. With the advent of electronic voting, younger people have more of the skills and aptitude needed for running the state’s elections. Currently more than 500 of our recruits are regularly reporting for duty in every local and statewide election.



Lowcountry Ministries Empowers Initiatives in Six Rural Counties this fall **More than 3,500 donors give to inspire hope from Emanuel tragedy**

Later this fall, more than \$1.5 million will be dispersed to community-based organizations engaged in social and economic justice through a special community fund created in response to the tragic shooting of members of a Bible study class at Charleston's Emanuel AME Church. Nearly fifty organizations from Allendale, Hampton, Colleton, Jasper, and rural parts of Beaufort and lower Charleston counties have applied for funding to address community concerns about health and health care access, food and nutrition, economic empowerment, and youth & schools.

According to Steve Skardon, the organization's Executive Director, the **Lowcountry Ministries Fund** was created in coordination with the City of Charleston to manage the overwhelming response to the tragic shootings at Emanuel AME last summer. "In a small way, the Fund's over 3,000 donors are hoping to see something new and helpful emerge from that dark time," he said. He said that the announcement of the grants would likely be made by the end of October.

An Advisory Committee of community leaders is currently evaluating the applications, and Mrs. Jennifer Pinckney, wife of the late Senator Clementa Pinckney, is consulting with the Palmetto Project on that process, along with The Honorable and Reverend Clementa C. Pinckney Foundation, established by Mrs. Pinckney and close friends to honor his life and legacy.

Lowcountry Ministries is still accepting donations at www.palmettoproject.org. However, prospective donors desiring to honor the life of the late Reverend Pinckney are invited to visit the Honorable Reverend Clementa C. Pinckney Foundation at senatorpinckney.org.





Palmetto Project Once Again to Lead Statewide ACA Enrollment **South Carolina has become a leader in outreach and customer service as nearly a quarter-million residents sign up for health insurance**

One year after the Palmetto Project was tapped to lead statewide enrollment efforts for the Affordable Care Act, South Carolina was among the top ten states in reaching and enrolling eligible working people in private insurance plans offered through the Federal Health Insurance Marketplace.



This summer the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services announced that the Palmetto Project will repeat its role as the lead statewide Navigator. The organization leads a coalition of state and community partners that provides public education and outreach, along with free in-person, online, over-the-telephone assistance, and consumer advocacy to South Carolinians in every county.

“Our numbers are high because so many South Carolinians originally thought they were not eligible for a Marketplace plan. This was particularly true with small businesses, self-employed people, and historically marginalized populations,” said Shelli Quenga, the Palmetto Project’s Director of Programs.

“Most people in South Carolina enrolled directly at HealthCare.gov,” she added, “but many others had unique circumstances or had questions about eligibility, plan comparisons, Federal subsidies, and tax benefits. We helped them with all of that.”

Open enrollment for the 2017 Health Insurance Marketplace begins Saturday, November 1, 2016 and ends January 31, 2017. At other times, residents can enroll if they have had a recent life change that affects their health insurance coverage. Eligible life changes that qualify someone for the Special Enrollment Period include job loss or other income change, loss of employer health insurance, birth of a baby, marriage or divorce, or aging out of coverage under a parent’s plan. The Marketplace helps uninsured people enroll in health coverage. Consumers can get more information or schedule an appointment with a Certified Marketplace Navigator by calling **signupSC** toll-free at 1-888-998-4646 or visiting www.PalmettoProject.org.



Families Helping Families of the Midlands Enters 27th Year

Holiday program provides food, gifts, and supplies to nearly 3,000 families in need

After 27 years we have lost count of how many lives have been touched by our **Families Helping Families** partnership with WIS-TV in the Midlands. Over 150,000 families have either been sponsored or served as sponsors of others, while countless more volunteers and donors have generously given of their time and resources. In a time of great national division, it is a testament to the residents of the Midlands that no one in our communities is left out of the spirit of the holidays. *Nell Killoy* nkilloy@palmettoproject.org



Low Country Aid to Africa Celebrates Thirteen Years of Giving to African Nations with Ties to South Carolina

Twelve years ago a small gathering of leaders of churches and synagogues in Charleston decided that it wanted to do more to affirm the historic ties between Africa and the South Carolina Low country. The group, now known as **Low Country Aid to Africa**, developed a working relationship with a number of African non-profit organizations and launched its annual “Evening of Entertainment” that raises funds for activities that include foster parents for AIDS orphans in South Africa and the expansion of a hospital in Malawi. As of this year the group had given more than \$115,000 in grants to our non-profit partners.



Palmetto Project Takes Nationally-Known Program to Georgetown Schools, Oprah says It “Could Change the World”

Challenge Day proven to reduce bullying, and create safer, more inclusive campuses

Fifteen years ago the Board of the Palmetto Project became alarmed over a survey suggesting that one-third of the state’s high school students feared for their safety at school. After looking across the country, they found an unusual program in California that seemed to be changing campus life at some of the nation’s most dangerous high schools. That program was known as **Challenge Day**.



Since that time the Palmetto Project has sponsored more than 75 Challenge Day trainings. The most recent were held April in Georgetown County’s four high schools, where students were encouraged to “Be the Change you seek in the world!”

The program is introduced to students through a day-long series of activities and peer encounters through which trained mentors encourage them to find common ground and create new, though unlikely, friendships.

Surveys of Challenge Day alums report that 86% said they became more aware of the needs of other students, 65% said they created new connections to their peers, and 73% said they felt safer going to school. Special thanks to the Bunnelle Foundation of Georgetown County for its support of this important work.



Community Concerns over Housing Puts Formerly Homeless Back on Track **Charleston's Tent City is closed, as residents find pathways back to housing and jobs**

Last January, Charleston's new mayor faced an immediate challenge in the form of a growing encampment of homeless citizens under the city's iconic Ravenel Bridge. The presence of between 100 and 200 people trying to survive in a community with no sanitation, security, or access to food and water had to be contained.

Mayor John Tecklenburg told his staff and the city's police chief that the problem needed to be addressed in a way that restored order and provided avenues for "Tent City" residents to transition into more permanent, self-sustaining living situations. He also asked the Palmetto Project to help raise funds from the local community to support these transitional efforts. Mayor Tecklenburg was a longtime Palmetto Project Board member and officer.

Within a month more than \$100,000 was raised for our newly-created Homeless to Hope Fund and the transition was underway. Today, Tent City residents have returned to more stable situations, entered job training programs, enrolled in services to treat addiction, found employment and signed on with community-based mentoring initiatives. The former encampment is now cleared and plans are underway to install new landscaping and build affordable housing.



Six Counties Receive Designation as Federal Promise Zone **Palmetto Project joins coalition to bring jobs, infrastructure, and services to I-95 corridor**

Congratulations to Allendale, Hampton, Jasper, Colleton, Bamberg, and Barnwell counties on their designation this year as a Federal **Promise Zone**. The designation means that for ten years these counties will get a leg up on their applications for Federal investments in everything from infrastructure to education to social services. Already grants worth millions of dollars have been awarded to the area through our partner, the Southern Carolina Alliance, which is coordinating the Promise Zone initiative.